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ABSTRACT

A conceptual model is presented to examine the hypothesis that androgyny is advantageous to the psychological well-being of both females and males in American society. A format for the multi-dimensional assessment of both sex-role components and indices of well-being is proposed, and possibilities for exploring the interface between these sets of measures are suggested. The model conceptualizes sex roles with four major sources of variation, i.e., gender, tasks assigned by gender and age, skills involved in completing tasks, and evaluation of the job assignment, as well as the assessment of psychological well-being in terms of self-esteem, personal distress, interpersonal and task competence, and social and situational support. Ideological dilemmas for the androgyny researcher are considered in terms of how: (1) current research fails to support the positive well-being outcome for androgynous persons across age groups and in situational contexts; (2) the well-being hypothesis may be differentially valid within varying developmental periods and particularly questionable for children; and (3) situational outcomes tend to be negative for persons who adopt nontraditional responding modes. Approaches for resolving these dilemmas are also suggested. (Author/NRB)

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Androgyny and Psychological Well-Being:

Some Ideological Dilemmas

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Androgyny and Psychological Well-Being:

Some Ideological Dilemmas

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual model for examining the hypothesis that androgyny is advantageous to the psychological well-being of females and males in American Society. The model proposes a format for the assessment of both sex-role components and indices of well-being, and suggests possibilities for exploring the interface between these sets of measures. The model suggests also that the evaluation of the androgyny hypothesis in relation to psychological well-being is a relatively complex one and has yet to be fully explored. At least three variables are critical to consider in evaluating the androgyny hypothesis, each of which presents either a methodological or a conceptual issue.

First, a survey of the relevant literature reveals that only selected aspects of the androgyny conception have been explored in relation to indices of well-being-- namely, personality traits, role attitudes, and participation in gender-typed activities. The restriction of assessment to these domains limits meaningful generalizations regarding the contributions of androgyny to psychological well-being. As suggested in this symposium and elsewhere, the range of assessment strategies that may engage sex-role indicators demands a multi-dimensional approach to the measurement of sex-roles and androgyny. Indices of well-being need to be examined within each context in which sex-role manifestations can be assessed.

Second, we have looked mainly at the adjustment advantages to restricted populations of college-age adults, and have generally neglected the adjustment value of androgynous orientations across the life span. As I will suggest here, the adjustment value of androgynous postures may vary across differing age spans

or within particular life stages. For example, developmental considerations become particularly salient as we move to support intervention programs to reduce sex-role stereotyping for preschool and school-age children. Where are the theoretical and research supports for attempting to produce androgynous children?

Finally, we have been relatively neglectful of androgynous orientations as they interact within situational contexts. Some interesting studies that address this issue suggest that situational variables may well determine the psychological adjustment outcomes for persons of each gender and for differing sex-role preferences. Of particular relevance here are the normative standards both within the self and within the social context, that mediate the outcomes of behavior, thereby influencing the phenomenological well-being of the individual. Situational contexts assume particular salience as individuals initiate nontraditional roles and exhibit previously inhibited cross-gender behaviors. The social impact of these nontraditional behaviors will tend to influence females and males in different ways, thereby leading to gender-differentiated interactions between androgynous behavior and situational outcomes.

My remarks today will touch on each of these three issues, recognizing that I will certainly pose more questions than I am prepared to answer. In addressing the issue of personal well-being, we are concerned with evaluating the theory that underlies the concept of androgyny. According to Bem's (1974) original formulation, androgyny was conceived as a format for positive mental health. That is, Bem proposed that the androgynous person is flexible and adaptive in diverse interpersonal situations. As a function of having a greater range of behavioral options, the androgynous individual can potentially function effectively in contexts that are culturally defined as either masculine or feminine. In contrast, the sex-typed individual is constricted by the tendency to inhibit cross-gender

behavior, thereby restricting that person's range of effective coping skills. In separately defining masculine and feminine typed situations, Bem clearly proposed a co-existence conception of androgyny that is reflected in most of the studies designed to test the sex-role flexibility hypothesis.

Research to test this hypothesis has focussed on four broad criteria of well-being: (1) self-esteem or positive self-evaluation; (2) indices of personal distress, such as anxiety, depression, and problem drinking; (3) interpersonal and task competence, such as initiation and maintenance of appropriate social interaction; and (4) social support, which involves the dimension of inclusion and exclusion, as well as positive and negative evaluation from others (Worell, 1978). With particular exceptions to be noted below, androgyny has not been shown to be consistently superior to masculine-typed orientations for either male or female adults in most situations. For younger children, sex-typed behavior has been shown to have some advantages within interpersonal contexts. The ideological dilemma for the researcher who is committed to the androgynous view of human behavior lies in matching our belief systems with the realities of the obtained data. A possible solution may lie in developing new sources of data collection, and alternative ways to examine the androgyny hypothesis. In the remainder of my time, I would like to explore some of these ideas and to suggest areas in which productive solutions may be reached.

Multidimensional Assessment of Sex-Roles and Androgyny: A Job Analysis

The first issue revolves around the definition and measurement of androgyny as a multidimensional concept (Bem, 1979; Katz, 1979; Locksley & Colton, 1979; Helmreich, Spence, & Holanan, 1979; Spence, 1979; Spence & Helmreich, 1979). In the context of individual life-span development, and the demonstrated failure to find strong correlations among existing measures of sex-role functioning (Kelly, Furman, & Young, 1978; Kelly & Worell, 1977; Spence, 1979; Worell, 1981a), it

appears that a broadened view of androgyny or sex roles is required. One way to approach this task is to view the concept of sex roles as a job description within a particular culture (Worell, 1981b; Worell, Note 1). Table I presents a model

Insert Table I about here

format for assessing androgyny in terms of job analysis, including choice of job, tasks to be completed on the job, competence or performance on the job, and degree of job satisfaction. It is proposed here that within American society, each of these indices is culturally gender-typed in some situations, and may correlate with some aspect of personal well-being. There is no indication here that any of these sex-role indices necessarily correlate with each other, although the gender-typed nature of the jobs suggests that in many instances, correlations among sex-role indices do appear (Katz, Note 2). For example, correlations appear among female gender, marital status, career status, instrumental skills, and degree of satisfaction with the combined job assignment (Pearlin, 1978; Sales, 1978; Maracek, Kravetz, & Finn, Note 3). In contrast, Spence & Helmreich (1979) report negligible correlations among indices of sex-role traits, role attitudes, and participation in gender-typed activities.

Turning to the right-hand portion of Table I, we see four major indices of psychological well-being: (1) Self-Esteem or Self-Evaluation; (2) Indices of Personal Distress; (3) Interpersonal/Task Competence; and (4) Social/Situational Support. Each of these indices can be measured, intercorrelated, and in turn, assigned to a cell that coordinates with the relevant sex-role categories. A brief survey of these possible cells quickly suggests that within the current research stream, many cells remain empty. It is proposed here that our test of the relationship between androgyny and well-being requires an examination of the range of possible coordinates between measures of sex-role functioning and measures of

well-being. Most of the current androgyny research, for example, lies along the mid-section of cells I, J, and K, which contains the correlates of sex-role traits. In contrast, research related to differences in well-being between males and females is focussed along cells A, B, and C. Although the job analysis format may not be the ultimate solution for a taxonomy of categories for measuring androgyny, it provides a reasonable structure within which to expand our hypothesis-testing activities.

Life-Span Contributions to Androgyny and Well-Being

The second issue I wish to examine relates to the increasing evidence that the hypothesized advantages of androgyny may vary along certain developmental dimensions. Phyllis Katz (1979) has pointed out that sex-role content is, in many instances, discontinuous. That is, assessments that determine an androgynous orientation for the five-year old may be quite different than those that structure the androgynous adjustment of the adolescent, and of the maturing adult. During early childhood and the preadolescent years, it appears that parents, peers, and teachers prefer and differentially reward children with sex-typed, rather than those with androgynous behaviors. In several studies, cross-gender play in young boys was found to isolate them from their peers and resulted in negative teacher evaluation (Fagot, 1977; Fagot, Note 4; Braunstein, Note 5). There is increasing evidence that preschool and elementary age children who adopt gender-related play and social behaviors are more socially acceptable to their peers than those who deviate. Conversely, children who adopt nontraditional patterns of social behavior may pay a price in both peer and teacher isolation and negative evaluation (Hall & Halberstadt, 1980). In the context of the young child's dependence on external support and validation, the higher rates of ignoring and negative feedback to androgynous children may have adverse effects.

In adulthood (mostly college students), the evidence suggests that androgyny is predictive of effective interpersonal skills in peer-related contexts, suggesting a developmental trend in peer evaluations of effective social behavior and a gradual disengagement of individuals from the evaluative feedback of authority persons (Bem, 1975; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976; Ickes & Barnes, 1978). However, in other areas of functioning, masculine-typed responding contributes to self-esteem about as well as does androgyny, and masculinity in both women and men is positively related in many studies to resistance to feelings of depression, helplessness, and anxiety (Chevron, Quinlan, & Blatt, 1978; Jones, Chernovetz, & Hansson, 1978; Adams & Sherer, Note 6). It appears that for adults of both genders, but especially for males, feminine-typed responding is the most deleterious to self-reported psychological symptoms, and feminine-typed individuals of both genders report a desire to increase their masculine-typed attributes (Worell, Note 1).

Some implications for educational and social change can be drawn from these diverse findings. I am particularly concerned about uncritical efforts to encourage androgynous or nonsexist education in young children. Although I will not risk the heresy of declaring that such efforts are dangerous to the mental health of our children, these educational interventions bear close scrutiny. In particular, we do not know the extent of cognitive and affective confusion that may result from teaching children a set of rules that inaccurately reflect the realities of the external environment. Here we have another ideological dilemma: by encouraging and teaching nonsexist or androgynous activities to our young, are we leaving them open to the risk of losing social support and peer inclusion? I would suggest that the preschool through the adolescent child is much less able than the adult to provide cognitive intervention and self-support for adopting an androgynous

or nontraditional set of behaviors. It appears that mediation of sex-role attributes toward increased androgyny may require differing strategies for children, adolescents, and adults. For children and, to some extent, the younger adolescent, the cognitive requirements for learning about gender classification, and the discrepancies between perceived reality, and hypothetical ideals, combined with peer and adult press toward traditional sex-typing-- all suggest a multidimensional approach using a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies. For adults, self-initiated efforts toward behavior change can be supported by means of selected peer and group support systems that will encourage movement toward nontraditional responding (Worell & Garret-Fulks, in press). The importance of environmental support for all groups who anticipate sex-role changes leads me to the third issue in evaluating the androgyny hypothesis: the contribution of situational variables to psychological well-being.

Situational Contributions To Well-Being In Androgynous Individuals

As a final consideration, we are faced with the realities of the social environment for all individuals who select and play out a nontraditional sex role. The mental health risks are evident for both men and women in the contexts in which their nontraditional adoption conflicts with the prevailing norms and expectations of the environment. For example, both men and women who select nontraditional careers in college emit more negative and less positive self-statements, with males showing high rates of self-criticism and females having low rates of self-reinforcement (Richey & Berlin, Note 7). For females, explicitly assertive and nontraditional behavior in predominantly male environments has been connected to interpersonal exclusion and negative evaluations (Coscich, Feinstein, Kidder, Maracek, & Pascale, 1975; Kelly, Kern, Kirkly, Patterson, & Keene, in press; Wolman, & Frank, 1975; Garret-Fulks & Worell, Note 8). As a result, the individual who wishes to initiate substantial changes in his or her sex-role behavior in an

otherwise stable environment is at a relative disadvantage and must be willing to risk negative feedback and isolation. As we become aware of the situational contingencies that accompany nontraditional or androgynous behavior, we may be in a better position to research the environmental contributions to increased stress. Once more, the ideological paradox lies in the mismatch between our wish to believe in a benign and accepting environment and the evidence that increased personal and social resources and support are imperative if we are to facilitate the psychological well-being of the androgynous individual across multiple situations and with a diverse range of significant others.

Summary

In summarizing the problems associated with evaluating the relationship between androgyny and psychological well-being, the issues appear to be both methodological and conceptual. The methodological issues involve the appropriate assessment of multiple aspects of both androgyny and psychological well-being; a model for conceptualizing this assessment task was offered that viewed sex roles in terms of a job analysis. The conceptual issues raise some ideological dilemmas and point to discrepancies between our implicit belief systems regarding the positive advantages of androgyny, and the evidence that is available to support these beliefs. As with many of my colleagues who research sex-role issues, I share these ideologies and beliefs, and I welcome continuing efforts to resolve these dilemmas.

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Table 1

14

Sex Roles and Psychological Well-Being: A Job Analysis

Assessment of Sex Role	Assessment of Well-Being			
JOB ASSIGNMENT (Gender stable over the life span?)	Self-Esteem: Positive Self-Evaluation	Indices of Personal Distress	Interpersonal/Task Competence	Social/Situational Support
Female	A	B	C	D
Male				
JOB DESCRIPTION (Tasks vary across age levels)	E	F	G	H
Leisure/play				
Academic				
Home				
Work/career				
Interpersonal				
Coupling				
Parenting				
Political				
JOB PERFORMANCE (Skills increase in complexity, content)	I	J	K	L
Competence				
Information				
Mastery				
Interpersonal				
Instrumental				
Expressive				
Task Specific				
Verbal				
Cognitive				
Physical/motor				
JOB SATISFACTION (Evaluation varies with life stage)	M	N	O	P
Attitudes/values				
Expectations				
Attributions				
Standards/ideals				